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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (6/13): AN "APOLOGY" FROM BUSH TO
LOWER EXPECTATIONS

Main Stories:

Front pages prominently report on, "a bloody day in Gaza," when 14 Palestinians were killed on June 12. Seven were killed in, "a mysterious explosion" at a Beit Lahiyya home in the northern Gaza Strip. The dailies also report that another 45 Palestinians were injured in the same accident. The three dailies lead with photos of the demolished area with hundreds of people standing on the ruins. An additional seven Palestinians were killed in an Israeli air strike on the same day. Related coverage in all dailies highlights chief PLO negotiator Erekat commenting on June 11 that, "any large-scale Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip would destroy the peace process and push the region and its peoples into further violence, chaos and bloodshed."

Egyptian mediation efforts to forge a truce between Hamas and Israel are front page news. According to Al-Quds, "Cairo received a positive Israeli response to the truce proposal." In contrast, Al-Hayat Al-Jadida runs Israeli opposition leader Binyamin Netanyahu comments from a DPA story, urging the Israeli Government to, "attack Gaza by land, air and sea." Finally, Khalil Abu Layla, a Hamas leader in Gaza, told Palestinian media outlets on June 12 that, "any Israeli invasion of Gaza will be no picnic for the Israelis."

The visit of Palestinian Premier Fayyad to Turkey gets front page billing in all dailies. According to Al-Quds, Fayyad is trying to create a, "new way of thinking" among ordinary people. The dailies highlight that Fayyad praised Turkish heritage and culture and discussed ways of supporting the Palestinian economy with the Turkish leaders.

Reports on internal Palestinian efforts at reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas feature on all front pages. According to Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad stated in a speech in Turkey on June 12 that, "restoring unity is among our top priorities."

Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida frontpage stories about the June 12 sentencing of three Hamas members by a Jordanian military court. The members were sentenced to five to 15 years in prison on charges of attacking an Israeli businessman, a Jordanian intelligence officer, and other targets.

Citing the German wire DPA, Al-Quds' inside page reports that General Jones reiterated U.S. commitment to security in the Middle East. His comments came after a meeting with the Egyptian Foreign Minister on June 12 in Cairo.

BLOCK QUOTES:

¶1. Independent Al-Quds runs its daily editorial under the headline, "The status of Bush's vision" (6/12): "... Bush has six more months in the White House. Let's assume that the American President and his team have made every possible effort to make progress on the Road map, meanwhile the Israelis, especially [Premier] Ehud Olmert, could exit the political arena at any second, leaving Israel in the midst of ... Kadima party elections and [early] parliamentary elections... So, who will be in charge of negotiations and the peaceful settlement portfolio if Olmert leaves office? Even if he does stay, there is agreement among Israelis that Olmert is not

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qualified or even able to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians or the Syrians... when Bush said at the end of his European tour that he will, until his last day in office, continue his efforts to achieve peace in the region, [he was recognizing current] ... realities and lowering expectations for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to that of a goal of merely producing some kind of declaration of principles, without dealing with details. In his statement, Bush is giving a kind of diplomatic apology before the [last] possibilities of reaching an agreement and implementing his famous vision vanish..."

¶2. Independent Al-Ayyam carries an op-ed by columnist Samih Sh'bayb entitled, "Internal dialogue... possible mechanisms" (6/12): "It was clear from the [Palestinian] presidential initiative for internal talks, that Palestinian efforts will be made within a greater Arab framework that will pave the way for talks and their success. These efforts have already produced a... quick outcome in the official declaration of Egypt as the host for the talks... there are some [additional] efforts by both Hamas and Islamic Jihad to conduct these talks under Arab sponsorship, especially the sponsorship of the Arab League... it looks like everything is ready to launch dialogue and tackle all problematic and complicated issues..."

WALLES